

UNITED STATES SENATOR • IOWA
CHUCK GRASSLEY
RANKING MEMBER • SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

<http://grassley.senate.gov>
press_office@grassley.senate.gov

Contact: Jill Kozeny, 202/224-1308
Jill Gerber, 202/224-6522

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Grassley Plan to Help Disabled Children Wins Committee Approval

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Chuck Grassley today won committee approval for his bill to provide health coverage to disabled children.

The Senate Committee on Finance passed the bipartisan *Family Opportunity Act*, S.321, by voice vote. Grassley said his initiative means that "parents with disabled children won't have to become impoverished or stay impoverished to get health care for their children."

The proposal, which Grassley first introduced with Sen. Ted Kennedy in 1999, allows states to create options for families with disabled children to buy into Medicaid while continuing to work. Parents would pay for Medicaid coverage on a sliding scale.

Medicaid is critical to the well-being of children with multiple medical needs because it covers many services that these children need, including physical therapy and medical equipment. Private health plans often are much more limited in what they cover. And many parents can't afford needed services or multiple co-payments out-of-pocket.

The practical result under current law is that parents with disabled children are forced to drop out of the workforce or keep themselves in a low-paying job just to remain eligible for Medicaid. result, under current law, a parent of a disabled child. "In effect, the government is forcing parents to choose between family income and their children's health care," Grassley said. "That's a terrible choice."

Grassley said the *Family Opportunity Act* is pro-work because it lets parents work without losing their children's health coverage. It's pro-family because it encourages parents to work and build a better life for their children. And it's pro-taxpayer because it means more parents continue to earn money, pay taxes and pay their own way for Medicaid coverage for their children.

Grassley said an Iowa family provided the inspiration for this legislative initiative. Melissa Arnold, originally from Red Oak, moved to the Baltimore area to obtain medical care for her son Adam, who was born with a short thigh bone. Melissa Arnold worked hard to obtain promotions and support her family but couldn't accept pay raises without jeopardizing Adam's Medicaid coverage. Adam's teenage brother couldn't even work part-time for fear of pushing the family income over the Medicaid limit.

"Parent want to provide the best they can for their children," Grassley said. "Congress should

give states flexibility to give families options without the federal government getting in the way."

The full Senate must now consider the *Family Opportunity Act*, which has been co-sponsored by 74 senators. The House of Representatives has not acted on the measure. Over 235 members of the House are co-sponsors of the bill.

Medicaid is a medical assistance program jointly financed by the federal government and state governments for eligible low-income individuals. It also covers health care expenses for the needy elderly, the blind and the disabled receiving cash assistance under the Supplemental Security Income Program.